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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000295

SIPDIS

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SCA FOR DAS GASTRIGHT, EUR FOR DAS BRYZA, SCA/CEN FOR PERRY

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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [KWMN](#) [SMIG](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: GOTX HEARS NO EVIL/SEES NO EVIL ON TRAFFICKING

Classified By: Ambassador Tracey Ann Jacobson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) During her February 21-22 visit to Ashgabat, G/TIP Officer Megan Hall met with representatives of the Human Rights Committee of the Mejlis, Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and the State Service for the Registration of Foreigners (SSRF) to learn about the GOTX's perspective on TIP. None of Hall's interlocutors could offer any tangible evidence of GOTX efforts to combat, prevent or sensitize people to TIP. None of the GOTX officials were even aware that there were several reported cases of TIP and that one Turkmenistani was actually convicted by a court here. While genuine ignorance about TIP prevents the GOTX from addressing TIP, the main obstacle, as with anything else here, is fear of admitting that societal problems exist in Turkmenistan. The following is a summary of Hall's meetings with GOTX interlocutors. End Summary.

MEJLIS DEPUTIES KNOW NO EVIL

¶2. (C) Hall opened up her meeting with Human Rights Committee Chairperson Myrat Garryev, and committee members Juma Jumayev and Yazdursun Gurbannazarova, by informing the deputies about the USG's observations on TIP in Turkmenistan.

According to USG information, there are fewer than ten reported Turkmenistani TIP victims who were trafficked inside and outside of Turkmenistan. The USG also believes the typical Turkmenistani victim to be an unemployed female used for sexual and labor exploitation. However, the problem could be much larger given the increasing numbers of unemployed who are eager to travel abroad for work, and most of these people lack any understanding of the rules and regulations regarding work, travel, and their basic human rights. Hall also explained that her trip was a fact finding mission to gauge the extent of TIP in Turkmenistan, as well as to hear the GOTX's point of view on the issue.

¶3. (C) Garryev agreed with Hall's assessment that the number of known TIP victims was low, and noted that these figures were not verified. Echoing the party line, Garryev disputed claims that TIP victims were unemployed, since there is no unemployment in Turkmenistan, "thanks to the Great Leader's policies." Furthermore, Central Asian culture and traditions act as a measure of protection, which as a result proves that TIP is not a problem not just in Turkmenistan, but in Central Asia as a whole.

¶4. (C) Conoff disagreed with Garryev's statement that TIP

was not a Central Asian problem. Recalling his experiences as Consular Officer and the TIP reporting officer in Bishkek, Conoff informed Garryev that TIP has been a growing problem in Central Asia, specifically in Kyrgyzstan. Garryev "clarified" his statement by saying that he meant to say "Turkmen Muslim culture".

¶5. (C) Jumayev dismissed Hall's comments and repeatedly demanded that Hall furnish "proof" that TIP was a global problem since as far as he knew, no Turkmenistani had ever been involved in TIP, no country had ever convicted anyone of any trafficking offense (including Turkmenistan), and nobody was doing anything to stop it. Even if it were true that there have been Turkmenistani victims of TIP, there were fewer than 10, so what was the big deal?

¶6. (C) Hall responded that IOM, one of the major international organizations dealing with TIP, not only confirmed the cases in Turkmenistan, but assisted the victims upon their return home. In addition, there have been many cases when traffickers have been convicted of trafficking crimes, including in the United States and Turkmenistan (Note: In September 2005 a woman in Turkmenabat was convicted of trafficking related crimes marking the first reported conviction of a trafficker in Turkmenistan. End Note.)

¶7. (C) Hall noted that while the number of reported victims was small, it was definitely a big deal, especially to the victims, who must now live with the memories of their experiences, and grapple with the shame and embarrassment of their past. As to the low number of reported cases, Hall said that G/TIP's experience has shown that so long as governments continued to ignore the problem, people are reluctant to report cases. When governments start addressing

ASHGABAT 00000295 002 OF 003

the problem, the number of victims being reported will increase. Hall added that it was the responsibility of all governments to care for its citizens; the USG does, and surely the GOTX would want to do the same for its citizens (Note: Jumayev, clearly embarrassed after this exchange, kept noticeably quiet for the rest of the meeting. End Note). Garryev assured Hall that the GOTX cared for its citizens' well being, and said that anti-TIP legislation was currently awaiting Mejlis approval, but he could not say when it would be approved. When asked if he could provide the GOTX's definition of TIP, Garryev declined, and appeared himself not know how to define it.

MVD HEARS NO EVIL

¶8. (C) According MVD International Department Head Muhammentur Humammetgulyev, the MVD is tasked to protect Turkmenistan from crime while upholding principles of human rights. Humammetgulyev said that thanks to the strong sociopolitical and economic situation in Turkmenistan, crime on a nationwide scale was very low. Humammetgulyev assured Hall that TIP had never been an issue here and that nobody had ever been convicted of any trafficking related crimes. Conoff informed Humammetgulyev that this was not the case, citing the September 2005 conviction. Humammetgulyev, along with his other interlocutors, were visibly surprised and busily began writing down the facts regarding the case. Humammetgulyev said that the MVD cooperates with international organizations to prevent TIP in Turkmenistan (how he did not say), as well as with neighboring countries. The MVD occasionally sends officers to attend international conferences including anti-TIP components. He added that two officers recently returned from an anti-TIP conference in Pakistan (a trip funded by INL). He estimated that since 2005, 15-20 officers were sent to conferences abroad for training, who then came back and shared their experiences with around 50 officers. While the MVD did not offer formal training on combating TIP, Humammetgulyev said that the MVD

would welcome more opportunities for training.

¶9. (C) When asked to describe the MVD's concrete steps to combat TIP in Turkmenistan, Humammetgulyev said that the MVD took "preventative measures," specifically raiding brothels and areas where local prostitutes meet. They then interview the prostitutes to learn more about how they became prostitutes. Most often the prostitutes say that they were deceived by their pimps into becoming prostitutes.

¶10. (C) Hall noted that such deceit is linked to TIP, and is a strong indication that Turkmenistani women may be used as prostitutes abroad. She also noted that based upon America's experience, the more attention paid to combating TIP, the more the actual extent of the problem became clear, and therefore more possible to combat.

SSRF SEES NO EVIL

¶11. (C) According to State Service for the Registration of Foreigners (SSRF) Deputy Head Yaylym Berdiyev, the SSRF cooperates closely with foreign governments, including the USG, to improve border security and keeps records of those arriving, departing, and transiting through Turkmenistan. (NOTE: The SSRF, established in 2004, is now the main agency charged with all migration and citizenship issues in Turkmenistan and has officers stationed at all border crossings, Ashgabat International Airport, and within all major cities. The USG, in cooperation with the SSRF, is currently funding the construction of two border crossing checkpoints for Turkmenistan. End Note.) He said that the SSRF's work and responsibilities increased since the 2004 lifting of the exit visa requirement which allows Turkmenistani citizens to freely travel outside of the country (Note: While no exit visa exists, the GOTX still maintains a black list of people, mostly those linked in some way to regime opponents and prevents them from traveling. End Note.) While aware that TIP was a regional concern, he assured Hall that TIP was not a problem in Turkmenistan, and that there were no known Turkmenistani TIP victims.

¶12. (C) After informing Berdiyev of the IOM-reported TIP cases, Hall said that given the SSRF's responsibilities, it would be in the ideal position to address TIP issues. Given its presence at airports and borders, they can be the first to detect trafficking trends and victims. Noting the growing evidence that those involved in terrorism engage in

ASHGABAT 00000295 003 OF 003

trafficking in persons, narcotics and weapons, the SSRF, given its responsibilities of preventing such problems from crossing its borders, should actively be involved in preventing TIP.

¶13. (C) Berdiyev explained that despite the SSRF's responsibilities, the MVD, not SSRF, was responsible for TIP issues, and did not provide any services/assistance to trafficking victims, other than bureaucratically helping to facilitate their return to Turkmenistan. He claimed that the SSRF provided information about working and traveling to Russia and Turkey to interested Turkmenistanis around the country, and said that he would be very happy to provide similar information about the United States. He added that he and around 20 other SSRF officers traveled to the United States on IV programs that covered law enforcement issues, including combating TIP. Upon their return, the officers shared their experiences with around 300 students at the SSRF training academy. Berdiyev added that in 2005 a group of Turkish officers came to Turkmenistan to train SSRF officers on combating TIP. When asked what he thought the GOTX definition of trafficking in person was, Berdiyev sheepishly admitted that he did not know.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Hall's visit to Ashgabat did not lead to any groundbreaking revelations about the GOTX's ability or willingness to combat TIP, but confirmed the GOTX's utter ignorance and lack of sensitivity of the subject. It also showed that none of the agencies involved in combating TIP had any idea what each other was doing, and that none of the agencies could even define what TIP meant. Notably, nobody, including the MVD, the agency tasked with heading the GOTX's efforts, was aware that a Turkmenistani court had in fact convicted someone of trafficking related crimes. Not surprising was the GOTX's assurances that everything was well here, constant reminders of their willingness to cooperate with the USG on TIP, or the willingness to take free trips abroad to attend conferences; the same responses to most of our engagements on controversial issues. A lack of GOTX willingness to recognize TIP as a problem stems from two reasons, an honest lack of understanding of the issue, and fear of exposing any social ill that would contradict the image of Niyazov's utopia. So long as the GOTX continues to refuse to admit that any and all social ills exist in Turkmenistan, we will continue to lack a more definitive view of TIP in Turkmenistan, as with such other issues as avian flu, unemployment, health, narcotics abuse(END COMMENT.

JACOBSON